

The Kentucky Educational Excellence Scholarship Policy Issues Work Group met May 12, 2006. Representatives from the Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority, the Kentucky Department of Education, and the Council on Postsecondary Education reviewed the recently enacted federal need-based scholarship programs: the Academic Competitiveness (AC) Grants and the National Science and Mathematics Access to Retain Talent (SMART) Grant. Beginning in the fall of 2006, first- and second-year college students who are eligible for Pell Grants can receive additional awards of \$750 and \$1,300, respectively, if they have completed a "rigorous secondary school program of study" and maintain a 3.0 grade point average in college. The legislation specifies four criteria for the rigorous standard:

1. Graduating with a specified advanced diploma (Kentucky's Commonwealth Diploma qualifies).
2. Completing the State Scholars Program.
3. Completing a pre-college curriculum.
4. Passing a minimum of two Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate courses with a score of three or higher on the AP exams or four or higher on the IB exams.

All four options are available to Kentucky secondary students.

Dual enrollment/credit programs are specifically excluded from the definition of qualifying rigorous curricula, and the legislation further stipulates that a student may not have been "previously enrolled in an undergraduate program" to qualify for the AC grant. The federal Department of Education interprets this to include high school students who have dually enrolled in college courses (regardless of credit). Kentucky has a significant number of such students, and the Kentucky Education Cabinet has sent a letter asking that Kentucky's students who qualify on other grounds not be excluded from eligibility on the basis of their previous dual enrollment status.

The SMART Grants provide additional awards of up to \$4,000 a year to Pell Grant-eligible third- and fourth-year college students who major in mathematics, science, or specified foreign languages. Recipients of those awards also must maintain a 3.0 grade point average. The federal grants emphasize the increasing attention being given to both high school and postsecondary curricula and the financial incentives being offered for undertaking them.

The policy group also heard Carolyn Witt Jones review several of the policy issues brought to light by the State Scholars Program (Agenda Item V-C-2).

In addition to the policy issues pertaining to curriculum, P-16 data capacity, and public communication, to which analysis of the State Scholars Program draws attention, the KEES policy group also saw the need to consider financial aid and college-going incentives more

broadly. Kentucky offers several financial aid programs in addition to the KEES merit-based grants, including the needs-based College Access Program (CAP) and the needs-based Kentucky Tuition Grant program (KTG), which is limited to students attending independent institutions.

Policy questions that the P-16 Council might advise its partner agencies to consider:

- Does the KEES program as currently structured fulfill its original purposes to increase college enrollment of Kentucky high school graduates, attract the most talented Kentucky high school graduates to Kentucky institutions, and raise the level of academic achievement in Kentucky high schools?
- Does the current combination of merit-based and need-based student financial aid effectively address the issues of college affordability and the promotion of access to postsecondary education?
- How might the CPE, KDE, KHEAA, and other relevant boards and staffs work together to better coordinate current financial aid programs and develop new policies to improve access and educational attainment in Kentucky?

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